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Dayna R Robison 09/20/2006 10:44:11 AM From DB/Inbox: Dayna R Robison

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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENNA 002790

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/AGS, INR/EU, AND EUR/PPD FOR YVETTE SAINT-ANDRE

OSD FOR COMMANDER CHAFFEE

WHITEHOUSE FOR NSC/WEUROPE

E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS: September 19, 2006

Tough Election Campaign

11. According to ORF online news, experts agree the current election campaign in Austria is "tougher in tone, but lacking in actual messages and concepts." There is "too much mudslinging, and not enough objective (discussion of) policies," they say.

Elsner in Hospital

12. Former bank Bawag director General Helmut Elsner has been taken to hospital in Marseille after he reportedly suffered a heart attack in a prison in southern France. Austrian officials are "rolling their eyes" at Elsner's alleged illness, a daily says. According to a report in semi-official daily Wiener Zeitung, Wolfgang Schubert, a lawyer for Elsner, says his client's health has "deteriorated dramatically" since his arrest at his villa in southern France last week. Schubert claims the former bank director's "heart troubles forced his transfer from a Marseille jail to a local hospital." Justice officials in Austria, however, believe Elsner is feigning illness to avoid being put on trial on charges of fraud and corruption. Extradition hearings in the case are going to be held on Wednesday.

Austrian Islamic Leader Understands Muslim Anger Over Pope's Remarks

13. In an interview Anas Schakfeh, leader of Austria's Islamic community, played down the significance of the strong reaction to Pope Benedict's quotation of a Byzantine emperor that has been interpreted as an insult to Islam. In an interview with centrist daily Die Presse, Schakfeh noted that, "Of 1.5 billion Muslims in the world, only a couple of thousand are demonstrating." He adds, however, that, "while I don't support street protests, I can understand these reactions because I know how the community is feeling. The popular mood is running hot." Asked if the Pope had made a mistake in making the remarks, Schakfeh said he believed the Pontiff meant to make the point that "violence is contrary to God's nature" and it would have been "sufficient" if he had said only that. In response to a question about a call by the head of an international Muslim clerics' association for next Friday to be a "Day of Peaceful Anger" over the Pope's remarks, Schakfeh said he didn't support such a measure. "I am in favor of quiet dialog between Christians and Muslims. We have common problems that we need to talk about."

Escalation in Budapest

14. Violent protests broke out in Budapest last night, as demonstrators demanded the resignation of Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsany. Comments from Gyurcsany that his government had repeatedly lied to win the general elections last April sparked the unrests, ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal reports.

Annan Not Optimistic on Iraq

15. UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has warned that Iraq is in danger of sliding into full-scale civil war and called for urgent action from Iraqi leaders and the international community, according to ORF radio.

Bush, Ahmadinejad Address UN General Assembly

16. World leaders convene in New York today for the UN General Assembly. President Bush is to address the Assembly, as are the leaders of France, South Africa and Pakistan. Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad will also address the Assembly later this evening. Washington correspondent Joerg Winter comments on ORF radio early morning news Morgenjournal: "Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is not welcome in the US: The visa issued to the Iranian President only authorizes him

to stay in New York and attend the UN General Assembly. He is not allowed to travel in the US. Iranian politicians are routinely denied US visas, with the exception of visits to international organizations. The Iranian President would have loved to have his 'showdown' with George Bush in a debate before the General Assembly. It is hardly surprising that such a confrontation is not going to take place. There's still ample room for conflict, though, and the quarrel over the Iranian atomic program remains a key issue. In his speech, US President Bush is going to push for sanctions again - unless Iran comes around in the nuclear dispute and suspends its controversial uranium enrichment activities. But the front against Tehran is crumbling: Russia and China were never likely to support sanctions in the UN Security Council. Now, in a surprise move, France has also opposed the US. Prior to his departure for New York, French President Chirac said it would be better to do without the UN Security Council in the Iranian nuclear conflict. The suspension of uranium enrichment was not a requirement for launching direct negotiations with Tehran, Chirac added. As the first high-ranking European representative, the French President is expected to repeat this proposal at the Assembly. Thus, a diplomatic affront seems to be unavoidable. After all, US President Bush stated the exact opposite just a few days ago."

Stirring up the Masses

17. Political and religious Islamists are having "a field day" in Arab countries, an Austrian daily says in an analysis: They are drawing on the suppressed peoples' frustration. Whether it is a speech by the Pope, cartoons published in a newspaper or the debate over headscarves - again and again, the West is "taken by surprise by vehement reactions from the Muslim world," independent provincial daily Salzburger Nachrichten says in an analysis. The "radical ranting of extremist mullahs is falling on fertile ground in the Arab world, because the people there are suffering from inferiority complexes," the daily continues. The reason "for the often violent reactions is a feeling of powerlessness in the face of an almighty Western world, which is perceived as arrogant, brutal and hypocritical," the Salzburger Nachrichten argues. Thus, the "protests of the masses the mullahs can so easily instigate must be seen as a revolt against decades of suppression and disadvantage on the part of the people, the persistence of which may be blamed on the Western allies of Arab potentates." After all, the daily concludes, "the mullahs are offering the people the alleged explanations for the people's plight (the West and the Zionists) on a silver platter."

McCaw